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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR CONGRATULATES CHIEF ADVISER ON SETTING
NEW STANDARD FOR ELECTIONS IN BANGLADESH

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

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¶1. (C) Chief Adviser Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed is justifiably proud of the Caretaker Government's success in holding free, fair and credible elections and setting conditions for improved future governance. Ahmed leaves office optimistic about Bangladesh's future, and plans to stay in the country after handing power to the new government. Now it will be up to the newly elected government to build on the CTG's successes.

The Ship of State Sails Safely Into Dock

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¶2. (C) During a January 2 meeting, I congratulated Chief Adviser Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed on the cleanest election Bangladesh has held to date. I told him the world recognized the magnitude of the accomplishment. He replied that the Caretaker Government had brought the ship safely into dock. It had not been easy, and at times it had appeared the CTG was losing its way. Ultimately, however, the CTG had achieved its primary goal: a free, fair, and credible election prior to the end of 2008. That election would in turn set the bar high for future polls in Bangladesh.

¶3. (C) The CA stated that the real heroes of the election had been the people of Bangladesh. They had wanted a return to democracy, but with better governance than before. When the CTG had assured them that they could vote in safety and their votes would count, they had turned out in record numbers. (Note: 87% of Bangladesh's registered voters cast their ballots on December 29.)

Looking Forward to a Better Future

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¶4. (C) The CA stressed that he was optimistic about the economic future of Bangladesh. The people of Bangladesh were talented and hard-working. While it was easy -- and perhaps right -- to feel that progress wasn't fast enough in Bangladesh, the country continued to make strides. Two decades of solid economic growth were beginning to make a real difference in peoples' lives. "I would rather have the steady 5 - 7 % that Bangladesh has enjoyed since the early '90's than the Pakistani model of 7.5% growth one year and 3.5% the next," the CA stressed.

¶5. (C) The CA said he had no plans beyond the turnover of power to the elected government. He planned to stay in Dhaka; presumably the next government would insist, for security reasons, that he stay in a stand-alone house rather than his modest apartment. He hoped to do some writing and some serious thinking about his two years in charge of

Bangladesh's Caretaker Government.

Comment

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¶6. (C) Fakhruddin Ahmed is justifiably proud of the primary accomplishment of the CTG: withdrawing some of the venom from Bangladesh politics and holding a free, fair, and credible election. He hopes that the CTG's neutrality and attempts to attack corruption will encourage the people of Bangladesh to hold their elected representatives to a higher standard in the future. Beyond that, he acknowledged, the legacy of the CTG would depend to a large degree on future actions of the elected government . If the next government ratifies the bulk of the ordinances that the CTG has enacted (which deal with everything from a national human rights commission to local governance), the CTG would have left behind a much healthier framework for Bangladesh's democracy.

MORIARTY